

**BETWEEN ► (PLAY) AND ◀◀ (REWIND): THE MAKING OF *SON DOS ALAS***

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*From New York to Rio, from Nairobi to Tokyo, hip-hop, more than any other musical genre or youth culture, has permeated nations, cultures, and languages worldwide. "Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind): the Making of Son Dos Alas" is about the experience of conducting research on the globalization of hip-hop and its local expressions between Cuba and Puerto Rico. Using songs and music videos produced as primary research data, this essay proposes hip-hop as an avenue for the study of social behavior and media as a "place" for contemporary anthropological inquiry. The research consists of original collaborative songs produced between rappers from each location who, due to political restrictions between nations, could not personally meet one another. The research reveals that it is through value systems and common civil rights struggles, more so than strictly the four elements of hip-hop (rap, break dance, turntablism, and visual art), that youth relate to one another and their global audiences. "Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)" frames the research experience, bringing to the forefront a fieldwork methodology titled Participatory Ethnographic Production that offers the discipline a manner in which to use media beyond a means for archiving, documenting, and disseminating cultural data. This analysis is further intertwined with an overview of the art of politics (and the politics of art) between two nations that have not had diplomatic relations with one another for over 50 years.*

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Hip-hop, more than any other musical genre or youth culture, has permeated nations, cultures, and languages worldwide. It emerged from racial and class rebellions during the post-civil rights era of the New York City fiscal crises in the 1970s. Hip-hop flourished under grim conditions as a vibrant expression of youthful exuberance used to overcome repression, marginality, discrimination, and hardship. Four means of expression, or elements, define hip-

hop’s linguistic, physical, visual, and auditory codes. Although the native language of hip-hop is English, rappers today in Kenya have dominated the flow in Swahili, dancers in Japan have turned break dance into an acrobatic phenomenon, graffiti artists in South Africa have developed a complex graphic design used from mural walls to skin, and disc jockeys in Germany have turned the record player into a musical instrument with its own form of musical notation.



Son Dos Alas cover. Painting/design by Woset-Wan. Photo by J.J. Marroqu n

In many cases, the globalization of hip-hop developed between “play” and “rewind,” where media reproduction and imitation played an essential role in its reinvention and acculturation abroad. For this reason, “Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)” focuses on media as an avenue for the exploration of hip-hop and proposes the use of audiovisual production to create a technological “place” in which to hold dialogues through repertoires and music videos. This methodology, working *with* rather than *on* subjects, proposes that the key site for anthropological inquiry is not necessarily to be “discovered” or “located,” as traditional disciplinary expectations may assume, rather, by using media, it can also be “created.” This approach expands traditional anthropological uses of media as a form of documentation or

dissemination of fieldwork data and demonstrates how media can offer the discipline a constructed and still relatively unexplored place for the study of human behavior.

Few places remain isolated from one another within the musical landscape of the Caribbean. A very unique case is Cuba and Puerto Rico. Although these two islands share common colonial histories, today they hold polarized relationships to the United States, the birthplace of hip-hop. Each island showcases a vibrant hip-hop scene and a thriving urban culture. Yet each maintains sharply contrasting cultural and economic infrastructures since the inception of Cuba's revolution in 1959. Despite Puerto Rico's geographical proximity to Cuba, it is a U.S. territory, bound by the U.S. embargo and travel ban regulations, thereby isolating hip-hop between islands, as well as its interpreters.

"Between ► (Play) and ◀ (Rewind)" explicates the ethnographic use of media to produce eight original songs between rappers from Cuba and Puerto Rico as integral to my doctoral research conducted from 2004 to 2010, titled *Son Dos Alas* (They are Two Wings). The songs and their respective music videos were the sole means of contact between artists. Of the eight songs attempted, four were completed. Comparing the completed tracks with the unfinished songs, the results show that these dialogues were accomplished when the themes of the songs were directed towards artists' civil rights. Case studies derived from the research demonstrate that the experiences rappers articulated within the media modified their everyday behavior and insinuated a sense of responsibility to their counterparts. In contrast, the songs that proposed to focus solely on hip-hop itself as means and message were left uncompleted. The collaborative songs reveal that it is through value systems and shared civil rights struggles, more so than strictly the four elements of hip-hop (turntablism, rap, break dance, and visual art), that motivated rappers to create these historically first musical dialogues.

By assessing value systems rather than elements in the analysis of hip-hop, "Between ► (Play) and ◀ (Rewind): the Making of *Son Dos Alas*" contributes a new perspective to the global study of this genre. It is a reflective narrative about the processes of anthropological fieldwork that aims to question disciplinary methods and ethical concerns about conducting research within hip-hop communities. Divided into subsections designated by media's

reproductive phases such as “► (play),” “■ (stop),” and “● (record),” I engage the concept of media as both a digital/theoretical and a linear/practical “place.”

“Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)” is not just a multimedia story about rappers from two islands and their repertoires; it is also a narrative about my own doctoral research experience. “Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)” takes a panoramic look at my journey conducting the dissertation between communities that were isolated from one another, and places my own story forging a place within my discipline as part of the greater academic and political framework.

### ◀◀ (Rewind): A Century of Musical Bridges

“Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)” takes as its point of departure the work of Puerto Rican poet and activist, Lola Rodr guez de Ti . She is best known for having written Puerto Rico’s national anthem entitled “La Borinque a,” while she was in exile from the island in New York. It was there that she met and collaborated with Cuban writer and nationalist leader, Jos  Mart . Together Mart  and Rodr guez de Ti  visualized an independent republic of Puerto Rico allied with Cuba (Toledo 2002). Based on their personal and intellectual relationship, Lola and her husband moved to Havana. In 1893, Rodr guez de Ti  published her third book entitled *Mi libro de Cuba*, where one of her most famous poetic verses appears “Cuba y Puerto Rico son / De un p jaro las dos alas / Reciben flores y balas / Sobre el mismo coraz n” (5) (Cuba and Puerto Rico are / The two wings of one bird / They receive flowers and bullets / Upon the same heart). After the appropriation of Puerto Rico by the United States in 1898, Rodr guez de Ti  remained permanently in Havana to continue her literary and political struggle towards the liberation of her island from a distance. Her political activism and feminist literary work alongside her dedication to the ideological unification of both islands served as the blueprint for the doctoral research of *Son Dos Alas*.

The historical shift of both islands experienced from Spanish colonialism to post-colonialism in the “New World” was marked musically by the genre of *son*. The sonic syncretism of the Spanish guitar with African drum rhythms brought forth this genre as an icon of the *criollo* identity in the Americas. *Son* was the first musical genre that merged African percussion

with a melodic counterpoint, while the structure invites lyrical improvisation (D  az Ayala 1994). *Son* is the first of three distinct post-colonial musical genres shared between Cuba and Puerto Rico.

During the early twentieth century, one of the most popular platforms for the contextualization and public presentation of *son* was expressed through Teatro Bufo (Bufo Theatre). This theatrical performance style consisted of satirical political commentary emphasizing three main figures: the black African, white European, and the *criollo* mulatto. These characters exchanged ideologies with respect to racial hierarchies, nationalist agendas, and tensions between the urban and rural identity. It also offered avenues of exchange between playwrights, actors, and musicians from Cuba and Puerto Rico. Teatro Bufo created an artistic platform for performances that encouraged musical experimentation and built the first international musical bridge between islands that led to the fusions of *son-montuno*, *son-guajira*, and *son-guaracha*.

Half a century later, the Cuban composer Benny Mor  internationalized *son*. While on tour in Puerto Rico he gave the singer/songwriter Ismael Rivera, who utilized *son* to reaffirm the African roots of the working class struggle on the island, the nickname “El Sonero Mayor” (The Supreme Improviser). Midway through the twentieth century both islands suffered massive migration towards New York and Miami. At the root of the musical experiments presented by Mor  and Rivera, *son* blended with jazz on the U.S. mainland. Groups such as Augusto Co n y Sus Boricuas, Alberto Socarr s, Marcelino Guerra, Machito, Chano Pozo, Arsenio Rodr  guez, and Miguelito Vald s were amongst the pioneers who allied *son* to American jazz and big bands such as the Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, and Arti Shaw Bands (Acosta 2004). These fusions symbolized an auditory experience reflective of the Cuban and Puerto Rican migration to the United States. Figures such as Tito Puente and Celia Cruz, Giovanni Hidalgo and Mongo Santamar  , and the culmination of groups such as La Fania yielded a second ethnomusical bridge expressed in the musical form of salsa. For the purpose of framing “Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind),” the migratory diaspora from the islands to the United States formed a second transnational musical bridge that rejoined Cuba and Puerto Rico,

but rather than between islands, this bridge was formed by the migratory experience of Cubans and Puerto Ricans within the United States.

The groundbreaking research and publications by authors such as Jeff Chang (2005), Juan Flores (2000), and Raquel Rivera (2003) clearly demonstrate how Caribbean migration influenced the early development of hip-hop during the post-civil rights era in NYC. The racial, cultural, and socio-political setting allowed for the unification of a generation under new musical terms. Today there are two types of Puerto Rican influences in hip-hop, one forged by Puerto Ricans in New York (also referred to as Nuyoricans), and the other from rappers on the island. Mainland rappers such as Big Pun, Fat Joe, and N.O.R.E. represent the Puerto Rican identity in very different contexts than their island counterparts such as Tego Calder n or SieteNueve. Similarly, hip-hop is younger than the U.S. embargo against Cuba, thereby restricting Cuban rap from any direct influences by U.S. art movements. This is compounded by economic difficulties on the island that have restricted youth access to equipment that would allow them to experiment with the means of production needed to recreate hip-hop. For this reason, it is essential to distinguish between the hip-hop created by Miami Cubans and that by Cuban rappers on the island. Rappers such as Pitbull and Don Dinero in Miami, although faithful to their ethnic and cultural roots, developed their musical careers under a radically different context than those on the island such as An nimo Consejo or Obsesi n. (For instance, see “La Ley 5566” by An nimo Consejo. Musical composition by Pablo Herrera. Video filmed, produced, directed, and edited by Melisa Rivi re. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rMlffc5sb0>;<sup>1</sup> and “Los Pelos” by Obsesi n. Musical composition by El Tipo Este. Video filmed, produced, directed, and edited by Melisa Rivi re. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vs8hCanPwUg>).<sup>2</sup>

Because of the distinct differences in the messages and visual content of rap from the islands versus its U.S. original, when referencing Cuban or Puerto Rican rap, “Between ► (Play) and ◀ (Rewind)” refers only to rap produced within each island as a geographical space, which also implies a social, political, historical, and economic arena. This essay contributes to the study of the same hip-hop movement that was birthed and flourished in the United States, but distinguishes its protagonists and their repertoire within each island, intentionally excluding the U.S. “cradle” of rap.

## || (Pause): Methodology and Theoretical Foundations

Documentary filmmaking and anthropology expanded together in the first half of the twentieth century. Russian filmmaker, Dziga Vertov, and French anthropologist, Jean Rouch, labeled Cin ma V rit  as provoking audiences to promote social change through realistic documentation laced with scripted camera work and editing. The American anthropologist, Margaret Mead, collaborated with Gregory Bateson towards incorporating visual imagery as the basis for their ethnographies and suggested that anthropology was a discipline beyond mere words, arguing that anthropologists were wrong if they only used pencil and paper as their instruments. Many other anthropologists have expanded the use of ethnographic filmmaking, among these Robert Gardner (2007) and John Marshall (1993) offer methodological and theoretical foundations in this arena. Media as a form of documentation and dissemination has also served anthropology as a method for cultural preservation (Prins 2002, Schein 2002, and Turner 2002), activism or advocacy (Ginsberg 2002), and analysis or interpretation (Lughod 2002, Wilk 2002). *Son Dos Alas* expands these disciplinary uses of media towards one in which the camera and microphone become agents in the field, and as such, music recording and ethnographic filmmaking became core elements of my fieldwork methodology.

The anthropological methodology of my research was built upon Franz Boas (1940) and Melville Herskovits' (1941) relativist approach towards the construction of knowledge that proposes social research as a constant interplay between experiences (fieldwork) and ideas (theory). Both are to be developed under the terms of the participants. Through the use of audiovisual production, my research aimed to amplify the interpretive approach accredited to Geertz (1973) called "thick description" that proposes the ethnographic text "creates culture" through a series of symbols and codes. "Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)" proposes a similar approach as attributed to Marcel Mauss (1967) and James Clifford (1988) of "constructing culture," but using the microphone and camera as complementary instruments to the text. Thus, this research methodology creates cultural symbols and codes with its protagonists, making of each song and music video a digital place for the study of human behavior.



*Son Dos Alas* did not utilize a traditional model where the anthropologist examined the subject as its object of study. Rather, I used a participatory/action method, stemming from the action research of Kurt Lewin (1951) and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970) in which I studied *with* rather than *on* subjects. This collaborative method between researcher and subject allowed us both to learn together. Each song and music video became a “place” built by a team of researchers and subjects together as producers and protagonists, with everyone feeding in their expectations and goals, on their own terms, and sharing their subjective interpretations towards creating cultural products: a song and a music video. This method breaks with many stigmas of traditional investigative hierarchies where the subject exclusively provides the action to be studied and the investigator, based on the subject’s behavior, selects which theory to be applied.

In the construction of *Son Dos Alas*, I applied Orlando Fals Borda’s approach of community action (1988). Such a method democratizes knowledge-making and grounds it in everyday community needs, converting research “subjects” into fellow “co-investigators.” Fals Borda’s method became a progenitor of participatory action research which aims to serve purposes beyond the creation and subsequent monopolization of knowledge. As complementary to Fals Borda’s methodological approach, I also aimed to exercise Antonio Gramsci’s concept of organic intellectuals (1971). As such, every co-investigator was treated as an intellectual that offered unique insight towards the creation, content, and production of each song and music video.

The most recognized anthropological method outside of the discipline is participant/observation. This method is in itself a political process that should honor the right for individuals to have a voice in how they are participated with, observed, and represented. I attempt to achieve this through collaborative fieldwork, taking from the works of Lewin, Freire, Fals Borda and Gramsci, accentuated by the use of audiovisual production in the co-creation of culture in order to propose the methodology I herein title Participatory Ethnographic Production (PEP).



Sangre Guerrera: Participatory Ethnographic Production		
Methodology Interviews Audiovisual Production	Participant Action Research & Ethnographic Production	Freire - Critical Pedagogy Fals-Borda - Community Action Gramsci - Organic Intellectuals Lewin - Action Research / Experiential Learning
1. Co-investigators 2. Working with (rather than on) subjects 3. Mutually profitable interests and outcomes 4. Bilateral consent (use rights of song/video/research) 5. Tangible productions (songs and music videos) 6. Generate mutually approved fieldwork data (informed consent)	Musical track and video production team: Siete Nueve Bian Aldo El Libre MuchRima Velcro Hermes Luis Melisa	M.Riviere 1. Technological resources, recording (audio/video) and skills 2. Publication platforms 3. Creative input 4. Audiovisual Educational workshops 5. Donation of used technology  Rappers & composers: 1. Repertoire 2. Image 3. Creative input 4. Networks and audience 5. Experiential Education
Audiovisual "thick description" Co-construction of culture through A/V production	Lyrical theme: 1. Building a bridge between islands 2. Warrior lineage 3. Descendancy from national heroes 4. Solidarity through bloodlines	Evaluation Reflection Mutual consent Co-publication Co-copyrights

**Figure 1: Participatory Ethnographic Production (PEP)**

Collaborative research substitutes the roles of researcher and subject with a reciprocative model that aims to level hierarchies in which all participants are co-investigators and co-subjects. This is not an immediate occurrence, rather a process that also demands co-investment by all parties. While an anthropologist studies a social group, the collective, in turn, investigates the anthropologist, thereby making knowledge-building a mutual endeavor. When successful, the method encompasses other issues anthropologists, documentary filmmakers, and artists face in collaborative work such as ethics, informed consent, shared intellectual property, and copyrights.

### ➡ (Fast Forward): *Spanning the Distance*

The fieldwork for *Son Dos Alas* was conducted between Havana and San Juan for six years from 2004 to 2010. Unlike the most common pattern of graduate study in which the social science student leaves their home institution to prove her/his theory or hypothesis in the field, I arrived on the islands without a set of concrete models, but rather with a fixed idea that

what I wanted to understand between both islands lied within their respective musical movements, and more particularly their contemporary hip-hop scenes.



Melisa Rivi re recording "Sin Permiso" with Luis D az 009Once in a recording studio in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Photo by author

The early stages of my research consisted of preliminary interviews with rappers. But in the process of conducting interviews, I discovered that my way of framing questions interfered with my ability to retrieve authentic answers. No matter how I positioned a question, my privileged access to both islands influenced how artists responded in order to either meet my expectations or address their own agendas. To overcome this limitation, I experimented with asking artists to respond on their own terms to their topics of interest. Using this method I filmed and recorded experimental songs and music videos. For an example, see "Coge tu Flow a La Aldea" by Los Aldeanos. Musical composition by Silvito el Libre, engineered and mixed by

Melisa Rivi re. Video filmed, produced, directed, and edited by Melisa Rivi re.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwZrofmx\\_c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwZrofmx_c).<sup>3</sup>



Melisa Rivi re filming "Sangre Guerrera" music video with Bian Rodr guez (El B). Havana, Cuba. Photo by author

As a music and video producer, I was progressing professionally, but as an anthropologist my research seemed unfocused. I discovered that artists were more articulate



and focused on the issues that most mattered to them when manifested through the microphone and the camera lens. The idea of producing a song between rappers from Cuba and Puerto Rico presented itself in 2004, the year that Hurricane Charlie canceled the annual Havana Hip-Hop festival. Despite the festival’s cancellation, the presence of international hip-hop artists and scholars inevitably manifested in gatherings in homes and on street corners. It was during these gatherings that I had a transcendental conversation with Yrak Saenz, Cuba’s pioneer rapper and member of the duo Doble Filo. Yrak expressed his desire to record a song with Vico C, his pioneer rap counterpart from Puerto Rico. It occurred to me whether I could produce a song between two artists who never met each other, and potentially of even more impact, two artists who could not “legally” meet. From there on, I was determined to produce a song between Yrak and Vico C, and as such, a contemporary, and potentially third post-national musical bridge.

Suddenly, my primary research question became apparent. Could I create a “place” for these two individuals to meet within the media, and could such an encounter lend itself towards an anthropological study? Would rappers from each island relate to one another despite their geographical and political isolation? Could the experiences within the media influence behavior in real life? It became evident that everyday experiences and local politics were taken into the media “place,” but could experiences that occurred within the media be transposed to everyday behavior? If the behavior of one or more of the protagonists manifested a significant change in her/his real life associated with the content in the media, and demonstrated a sense of responsibility to her/his counterpart or the media place, then: (1) we can conclude that a genuine exchange affecting human development occurs within the media; and (2) the media serves as a “place” for anthropological inquiry.

In my journey to unite Doble Filo with Vico C, I started working among the artists with whom I was already associated. The first song between An nimo Consejo and Tego Calder n, today known as the title track of the research, “Son Dos Alas,” took 18 months to produce. The lack of broadband internet access in Cuba forced hand-to-hand exchanges, requiring travel to each island to personally record and physically transfer files. The song became the title track of the dissertation because, at the time, I thought it might be the only recording.

(<https://soundcloud.com/anonimoconsejo/son-dos-alas>, “Son Dos Alas” by An nimo Consejo and Tego Calder n; Musical composition by Paul “Echo” Irrizary and Alfredo “Punta de Lanza” Hern ndez; Additional vocals by Alfredo “Punta de Lanza” Hern ndez and Viviana Pintado; Recorded, engineered and mixed by Jos  Cotto and Melisa Rivi re; Produced by Melisa Rivi re).



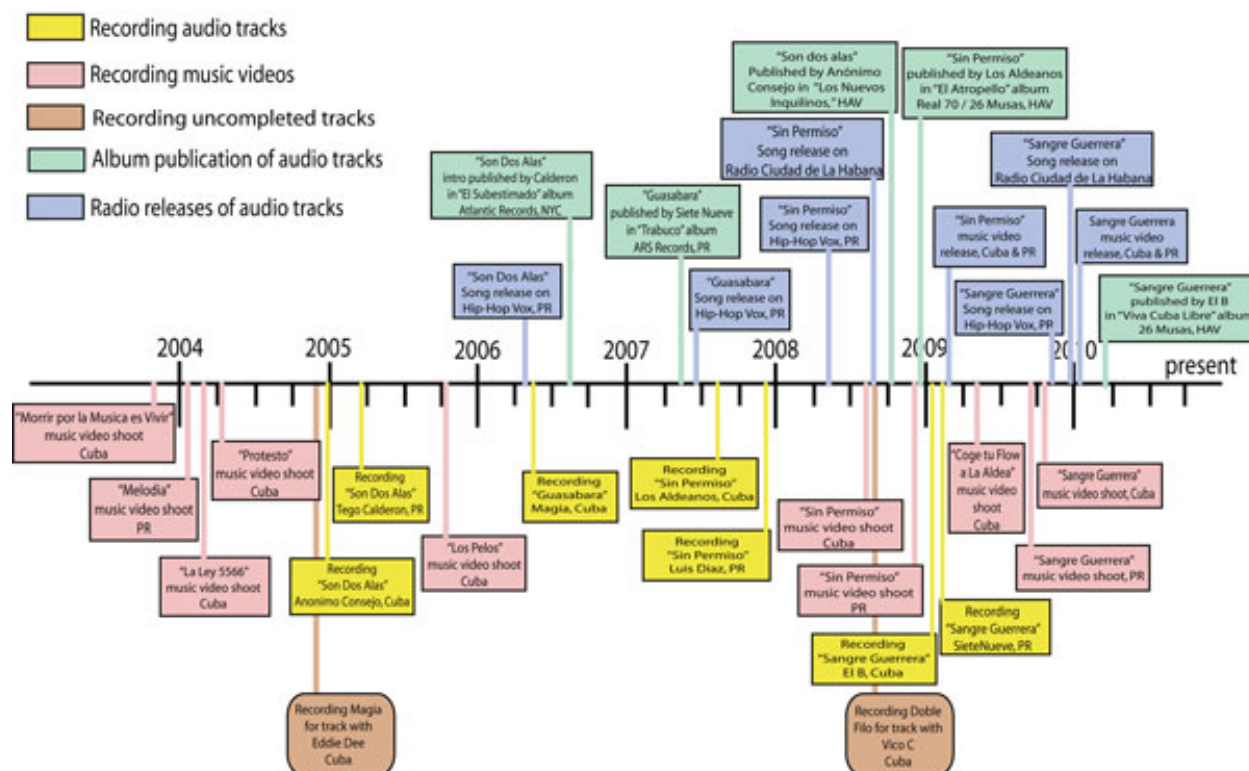
Left: An nimo Consejo in Alamar filming “La ley 5566” music video. Right: Tego Calder n interview with author in 009Once home recording studio, San Juan Puerto Rico. Photos by author

In the span of six years, I attempted to produce eight songs between islands of which only four were completed. Songs that were not finished include a track between Eddie “Dee”  vila and Magia L pez. Magia recorded her portion proposing a theme about the role of Latinos in rap’s history, but Eddie failed to respond. Another song between Tek One and El Adversario about rap freestyle battles stayed at the phase of preliminary discussions. The same was true for a song between Papo Record and Chinonyo that proposed to address the tensions between hip-hop and *reggaet n*. Finally, the song that instigated the project between Doble Filo and Vico C remains, to this day, uncompleted. Doble Filo recorded their portion; however Vico C abstained from responding. I refrain from elaborating the multitude of reasons why artists ceased participation, instead I leave it to the responsibility of each artist who either lost

interest or became impossible to locate. It should be noted, however, that the anti-Castro Cuban-American community from Miami openly threatened to boycott participating artists, likely swaying the availability of artists who had the most to lose from a decline in album sales.

## SON DOS ALAS: A MULTIMEDIA ETHNOGRAPHY OF HIP-HOP BETWEEN CUBA AND PUERTO RICO

### ETHNOGRAPHIC PRODUCTION TIMELINE 2004 - 2010



\* Music video releases were held at La Madriguera Arts Center in Havana and via youtube worldwide.

\*\* I facilitated but did not produce the song Guasabara. Alexey (El Tipo Este) recorded Magia and Jko Dox recorded SieteNueve as well as edited and mixed the song.

Figure 2: Melisa Rivi re's Ethnographic Fieldwork Timeline

### ■ (Stop): The Politics of Art and the Art of Politics

When I began my anthropological journey, I had novice dreams of uncovering cultural footprints, analyzing social phenomena, and contributing to multidisciplinary and multicultural educational platforms. But today there is no work in museums or universities, and the few positions that do exist are unfathomably competitive. The more lucrative fields in anthropology

are in the areas of marketing or military cultural intelligence. The recording and analyzing of cultural knowledge benefits both professional arenas similarly: learn in detail the daily life of the subjects in order to exploit them better.

The more aggressive of these two career fields belongs to the use of cultural intelligence within the military context, which in the last two decades has formalized its “human terrain systems” (U.S. Army 2013, Whitehead 2009). The system applies the cultural knowledge provided by anthropologists as “weapons of peace” to locate dissident or counterinsurgent social cells. In 2007, the American Anthropological Association’s Executive Board Statement on Human Terrain Systems denounced this kind of military program because it violates the ethical codes of the discipline with regard to receiving voluntary informed consent and protecting the subject of study. But the term “protect” is often manipulated with respect to issues of national security.

In the United States, a graduate degree is an expensive privilege, and most graduate students require some sort of financial support to conduct research abroad. Students who want to develop studies in countries classified as “hostile” to U.S. national security are seduced by scholarships that offer support towards language instruction and cultural analysis abroad. Among the more assertive programs that fund research in Cuba are the National Security Education Program, the Boren Awards for International Study, and a handful of grants offered by the Department of Education endowed by USAID. These scholarships, much like the Fulbright, are illegal in Cuba because projects that are economically nourished by the U.S. government are prohibited (Cuba law #88, Cuban National Assembly 1999). Law #88, Protection of the National and Economic Independence of Cuba, is a response by the Cuban National Assembly to the U.S. Helms-Burton law of 1996 that allocated U.S. government funding to undermining the Castro Administration by financing counterrevolutionary cells within the island.

Many U.S. research institutes and funding agencies whose interests lie in circumnavigating Cuban state security disassociate themselves with their potential fieldworkers by using third party agencies. The recent case of Alan Gross offers an excellent example of such an operation funded by USAID through a third party, Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI). Alan Gross, the DAI subcontractor conducted a series of trips to Cuba on a tourist visa to set up



satellite internet connections that aimed to perform “democracy-building” on the island (Weisman 2012). Under Cuban Law #88, any U.S. funded programs of this nature are illegal. U.S. State Department and third party agencies rely on the inability of Cuban officials to review all travelers thoroughly for visa approvals and many slip through, only to be later deported, or in the case of Alan Gross, imprisoned. Through their participation in these types of programs or by receiving funding from U.S. government entities, students often unknowingly contribute to military human terrain systems by delivering their raw data of interviews, photos, notes, and recordings without realizing that this can present serious ethical problems in the international locations where they choose to study, both for themselves, as well as for their subjects.

“Cuba” and “Puerto Rico” are foremost political terms, then geographic ones. The fact that my research was creating platforms for expression and publication for artists whose repertoire was considered locally “censored” raised national security concerns in both locations. Puerto Rican rappers, Luis Diaz of Intifada, SieteNueve, and Tego Calderón are public pro-independence figures who speak out against the islands commonwealth status. Similarly, many of the Cuban rap groups I worked with tend to produce “protest rap.” More particularly, the duo, Los Aldeanos, have an arsenal of songs against the Castro Administration. Geoffrey Baker’s (2011) research reflects on Los Aldeanos as displaying a kind of “revolutionary fundamentalism” in their attacks on inequalities, special privileges, materialism, and a decline in social solidarity. Sujatha Fernandes’ (2006) research proposes that youth in Cuba produce hip-hop in order to rebel against systemic authorities, reinterpreting hip-hop as a tool for defining their rebellion. Despite what may seem like differing political views from the Puerto Rican rap duo Intifada and the Cuban duo Los Aldeanos, it is their shared opposition to their respective national status quos, and their joint call to denounce government corruption, that united them in their song “Sin Permiso” (Without Permission). See it performed by Los Aldeanos and Intifada: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBYAbuLxT5k>. (Musical composition by Yallzee. Recorded, engineered and mixed by Melisa Rivièrè. Video filmed, produced, directed, and edited by Melisa Rivièrè.)<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, the video clips I produced were perceived as threatening to U.S. national security because they did not present rappers marching with gladiolas or on hunger

strikes. Contrary to public opinion and popular notions in the United States, the songs and video clips I produced presented educated, intelligent, healthy, and determined rappers. These images do not coincide with Washington’s foreign policy towards Cuba (U.S. embargo against Cuba 1962; Cuban Democracy Act 1992), or with the anti-Castro mass media campaigns of the Miami based exile community (Radio Mart  and TV Mart ), and they served no purpose to the National Guard’s incentives to contain underground rap in Puerto Rico (Rivera 2009). My fieldwork promoted interrogation by Homeland Security upon each return to the U.S., at times insinuating that my work appeared more practical than academic, questioning my use of an education license for travel to Cuba while threatening to revoke my passport. Perhaps I should reiterate that the primary years of my research took place during the Bush Administration, which was particularly aggressive towards Cuba.

The 2006 U.S. Cuba Commission Report presented by the then secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, makes reference to a marginalized group of Afro-Cuban males, below the age of 35, who are under-represented in leadership positions. The Cuban rap community clearly encompasses this demographic. Rice cites spaces of artistic presentation and assembly as locations to scout out and recruit dissident youth. The report calls for the U.S. State Department to monitor this demographic, and their assembly sites, in order to identify potential dissidents and their social networks. Simultaneously monitoring such groups also includes trailing Americans who have links with these underground public figures.

As a U.S. citizen conducting fieldwork for a U.S. institution of higher learning, my permission to travel to Cuba required approval from the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury. That the U.S. government should need to “approve” my research, compounded by Rice’s Cuba Commission Report of 2006, served as grounds for speculation about my fieldwork from Cuban authorities. In a post-cold war era, music has become a weapon of ideological warfare. In Cuba, it is called the *Batalla de Ideas* (Battle of Ideas). Rap’s inherent socio-critical content in both field sites created suspicion as to what political interests the research might serve. Needless to say, the doctoral research became a project of interest for both U.S. as well as Cuban authorities.

Public opinion also attempted to manipulate the project. Just prior to the release of Tego Calderón's sophomore album by Atlantic Records in 2006, Calderón received boycott threats if he published the song "Son Dos Alas" (Primera Hora 2005). These threats carry their weight and are a valid concern for artists who depend on a certain number of album sales to meet their contractual agreements with major labels. Rather than publishing the entire song in his album, Calderón used only 33 seconds of the introduction for fear of boycotts from Miami consumers, one of the largest groups of Latin music buyers and concert audiences in the U.S.

In various lectures where I exhibited some of my music videos, it was hinted to me that it would be more valuable (and potentially fiscally lucrative) to alter the data of the music videos. It was insinuated that potential funding was available for the "Sangre Guerrera" (Warrior Blood) music video in which artists traffic blood of their national heroes in cardboard boxes, if I were to alter the content and have them traffic metaphors of "democracy" instead.

In the twenty-first century, U.S. foreign policy initiative towards Cuba and Puerto Rico narrowed in on the issue of human rights. The most controversial dynamics that brought attention to the *Son Dos Alas* doctoral research was the implementation of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to: (1) freedom of expression (Article 19), linked to the musical repertoires, (2) freedom of assembly (Article 20), manifested by concerts, exhibitions, symposiums, and meeting spaces, and (3) the right to travel (Article 13), which pertains more to musicians than other types of artists. Despite my insistence on maintaining political and economic neutrality, it was with the latter, by blogging a reflection essay titled "Where is my Cuba?" about a rapper's right to travel to an international freestyle rap competition (Rivièrè 2008), that I naively provided free marketing for RedBull and contributed cultural intelligence to Washington. But ironically the ingenuousness also allowed me to discover the key element that would prove the validity of my research hypothesis, proving media as an ethnographic place.

► **(Play): "¿Y mi Cuba dónde está?" (Where is my Cuba?)**

*Son Dos Alas* created songs and music videos that shed light on issues of human rights and yielded global media attention. One of the ethnographic case studies from the doctoral research exposed in the essay "Where is my Cuba?" was cited in the 2009 Human Rights Watch.

The essay and its high profile mention brought global attention to Los Aldeanos who, at the time, were denied their right to perform nationally or tour outside of Cuba. That same year CNN International also featured an article about the publication platforms my research was making available to Cuban rappers with a focus on state censorship (Tutton 2009).

With the increased media attention and the rising popularity of Spanish rap worldwide, Red Bull, the European beverage company, sponsored a freestyle battle throughout sixteen Spanish-speaking countries called La Batalla de los Gallos (Freestyle Cockfight). For its protagonists and its international community of followers, Red Bull's Freestyle Cockfight became the equivalent to the Grammy Awards, but with a very masculine, virile, and humiliating process of elimination that yields a single winner. The competition obviously served as a promotional gimmick for Red Bull's energy drink. Despite their attempts to be an "alternative" type of beverage-company whose branding model relies more on experience than logo placement, it remains a capitalist corporation with intentions of profiting from sales in the Cuban market. The mere fact that it has a marketing agenda, questions how much it can offer Cuba's socio-economic fabric.

For purposes of "Between ► (Play) and ◀◀ (Rewind)," the relevant details about Red Bull's Freestyle Cockfight are that Bian Rodr guez, stage name El B, member of the duo Los Aldeanos, won the national competition two consecutive years in 2007 and 2008, but he never received the Cuban emigration permits to participate in the international competitions in Venezuela and Mexico, respectively. In 2008, SieteNueve, who had collaborated with Magia on the song "Guas bara" (Battle), served as judge for the international competition. The news of El B's potential absence led SieteNueve to design a t-shirt with the message: "Where is my Cuba?" Isolated, the message is a comment about El B's absence to the final round of the international Freestyle Cockfight. But the key is that the message was not isolated. "Where is my Cuba?" were precisely the same words SieteNueve used to introduce Magia in his song "Guas bara." In the track, he names all the countries of Latin America and asks, "Where is my Cuba?" to which Magia replies, "as always, here" and continues with a set of lyrical bars that critique the abuse of power and the brainwashing many youth suffer to fulfill their government's agendas, particularly when recruited as soldiers of war. (<https://soundcloud.com/alter-nativas/guas->

[bara-by-sietenueve](#), “Guas bara” by SieteNueve, featuring Magia L pez (of Obsesi n); Musical composition by Nuff Ced; Engineered and mixed by Jko Dox International Facilitator / Producer: Melisa Rivi re).

There may be several ways to interpret SieteNueve’s double entendre with reference to the saying “Where is my Cuba?” as well as his decision to transcend the question from the song to a t-shirt. At the time, Magia was the director of the Cuban Rap Agency and the coordinator of the national Cuban Red Bull Freestyle Cockfight. In this role, she was one of the people who could have defended El B’s right to travel as a professional rapper to the international competitions in Mexico and Venezuela. However, she chose to do nothing to support El B. A new context for old lyrics questioned her already uncomfortable position between that of rapper and that of government administrator. The same words, “Where is my Cuba?” used solely within the media, now referenced outside of the media, seemed to offer tangible results. The new use hinted to the reality that Magia had become victim of her own criticisms, but even more valuable was that the saying, in its new use, projected a claim of responsibility by SieteNueve towards Magia and El B on a t-shirt displayed in real life.



Bian Rodr guez (El B), Magia L pez, Freddy Abreu Sibilia (SieteNueve). Left and center: El B and Magia at Batalla de los Gallos, 2008, Havana. Right: SieteNueve filming “Sangre Guerrera” music video, Puerto Rico. Photos by author

The fact that SieteNueve was independently motivated to place a saying that had occurred solely within the media onto a shirt he wore as judge of the international battle served as evidence to support that there is, in effect, a tangible place within the media for an encounter that alters human behavior, and therefore, a place for anthropological research. However one chooses to interpret the symbolism or codes of conduct between Magia, SieteNueve, and El B, the important detail for the doctoral research was that the conversation between the three within the media not only reflected a reality, but also influenced their sense of responsibility and their behavior towards one another. This dialogue between the three protagonists, isolated from each other, was manifested only within the means of production (songs and video clips), until SieteNueve designed a shirt in Puerto Rico that he exhibited in Mexico offering a glimpse of the very real tensions occurring in Havana. The simple act of self-determination that moved the conversation from within the media to real-life activism gave validity to my hypothesis that we can create a “place” within media for the study of human behavior.

Although SieteNueve and El B failed to meet in Mexico, both returned to the media and to the *Son Dos Alas* project in order to carry out their encounter. Whether it would be in real life or within the media, the encounter would be “real.” With the resurrection of the phrase, “Where is my Cuba?” this time as a triumphant claim of resistance, the saying and the t-shirt became the main focal points of the last co-production in the series titled “Sangre Guerrera” (Warrior Blood, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lwL2D5yNFg> by El B and SieteNueve. Musical composition by El Aldeano; recorded, engineered and mixed by Melisa Rivièrè. Video filmed, produced, directed, and edited by Melisa Rivièrè).<sup>5</sup>

Different from previous songs or music videos in this series, “Sangre Guerrera” addresses the issue of self-presentation. I appear in the video in a supporting role within the ethnographic media place, creating a bridge between islands. As I became an integral member of the local scenes, rappers insisted I included myself into the script. This inclusion demonstrates how the methodology, Participatory Ethnographic Production, facilitated all of us to act as co-investigators, co-subjects, co-producers, and co-protagonists.



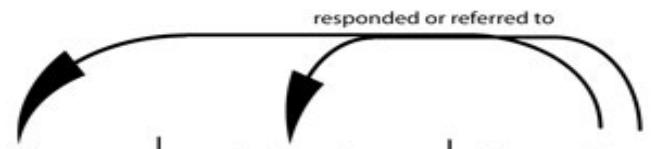
### ● (Record): *World Citizens*

The songs and music videos serve individually as “places.” But, when comparing the songs that were completed with those that were not, we see a broader pattern that is perhaps more valuable. The pattern allows us to see how hip-hop served as an avenue for the *Son Dos Alas* research project, but by itself, the genre did not define this “global movement” that joined the two islands.

The four completed songs include “Son Dos Alas” by An nimo Consejo and Tego Calder n, which aims to transcend political barriers through racial solidarity and calls for the unification of the hip-hop generation worldwide to combat institutional racism. The song “Guas bara” between SieteNueve and Magia is an affirmation against war and a rejection of coercive military recruitment tactics that brainwash youth in order to fulfill government agendas. The theme of “Sin Permiso” between Los Aldeanos and Intifada is a statement against class divisions and a call to signal out government corruption. Finally, “Sangre Guerrera,” by El B and SieteNueve, offers a bridge between islands to claim the right to meet each other, to build a “new rapper” injected with the blood of their national heroes, using hip-hop as a unifying life-source that runs through their veins.

The four completed songs reflect a reality that demonstrates the validity of the space created within the media using hip-hop as a means. As we see in the case study of “Where is my Cuba?” its protagonists created a sense of responsibility to each other that altered their behavior in real life. Now, when we broaden the panorama to include the uncompleted songs, it becomes evident that the dialogues of these encounters built a bridge only when the subjects were directed towards civil rights such as racial equality, the working class struggle, and the denouncement of government corruption. But the songs that proposed to focus on hip-hop itself as avenue and subject, the means and the message, such as being the pioneers of hip-hop, the improvisational values in freestyle rap, the role of Latinos in hip-hop, and the tensions between rap and *reggaet n*, did not seem to create sufficient motivation for neither the bridge to be built nor the place within the media to be co-created.





Son Dos Alas 2004 - 2006	Guasábara 2005 - 2007	Sin Permiso 2007 - 2009	Sangre Guerrera 2008 - 2009
<p>Musical track production team: Kokino Sekou Tego Echo Hyde Diesel Alfredo Viviana DJ Racier Melisa</p> <p>Lyrical theme: 1. Race, racism, and racial solidarity 2. Afro-Latin identity and pride 3. Connectivity (two wings of one bird)</p>	<p>Musical track production team: Siete Nueve Magia Alexey Jko Dox Nuff Ced Melisa</p> <p>Lyrical theme: 1. Anti-war 2. Deceptive military recruitment tactics 3. National and international representation 4. Latin American solidarity</p>	<p>Musical track production team: Luis Aldo Bian Yallzee Humbertico Melisa</p> <p>Music video production team: Aldo Bian Melisa</p> <p>Lyrical theme: 1. Corruption 2. Bureaucratic processes 3. Double standard of diplomacy 4. Class solidarity</p> <p>Music video theme: 1. Locality 2. Shared everyday routines 3. Progress and forward transit</p>	<p>Musical track production team: Siete Nueve Bian Aldo Melisa</p> <p>Music video production team: Aldo Bian El Libre MuchRima Velcro Hermes Luis Melisa</p> <p>Lyrical theme: 1. Building a bridge between islands 2. Warrior lineage 3. Descendancy from national heroes 4. Solidarity through bloodlines</p> <p>Music video theme: 1. The "New Rapper" 2. Trafficking blood 3. Surveillance and sousveillance</p>
<p>Locations: Laboratorio Nacional de Música Electroacústica (La Habana) The Lab Studios (Puerto Rico)</p>	<p>Locations: Obsesión's home studio (La Habana) Estudio de JKO Dox (Puerto Rico)</p>	<p>Locations: Real 70 (La Habana) Estudio 009Once (Puerto Rico)</p>	<p>Locations: 26 Musas (La Habana) Estudio 009Once (Puerto Rico)</p>

Figure 3: Son Dos Alas completed songs

uncompleted untitled track #1	uncompleted untitled track #2	uncompleted untitled track #3	uncompleted working title: "Abriendo Caminos*"
2004 - 2006	2005 - 2007	2007 - 2008	2004 - 2010
Production team: Eddie Dee Magia Echo Melisa  Progress: Recorded Magia's vocals on musical track composed by Echo  Proposed lyrical theme: - Role of Latinos in hip-hop  Location: Laboratorio Nacional de M�sica Electroac�stica (La Habana)	Production team: TekOne Adversario Melisa  Progress: preliminary discussions  Proposed lyrical theme: - Improvisation - local/global freestyle "kings"	Production team: ChinoNyno Papo Record Melisa  Progress: preliminary discussions  Proposed lyrical theme: - Hip-hop rap and reggaeton	Production team: Doble Filo Vico C Gabo Melisa  Progress: recorded Doble Filo's vocals on musical track composed by Gabo  Proposed lyrical theme: -Hip-hop pioneers  Location: Real 70 (La Habana)

\* "Abriendo Caminos" between Doble Filo and Vico C, although never completed, was the originally proposed collaborative track that instigated the Son Dos Alas research project

Figure 4: Son Dos Alas uncompleted songs

It may be mere coincidence, or it may be that the theme of hip-hop in and of itself was not profound enough to motivate responsibilities and commitments. These first musical exchanges between Cuba and Puerto Rico's hip-hop generation were not motivated by their affinity to the musical genre as much as by their shared civil rights struggles. If my results are based on coincidence or interpretive patterns depends on future collaborations and political changes that may allow for real life personal encounters.

The hip-hop generation worldwide may not be educated about the U.S. embargo against Cuba, or aware of the ambiguous status of Puerto Rico as a “free-associated” state. However, with the popularity of this collection of songs and music videos, they learned that their leaders are not waiting for bilateral talks at the state level to meet each other; in fact, they already have, in an ethnographic place called media.

The legacy of *Son Dos Alas* is to have created a “place” where Cuban and Puerto Rican rappers challenged the barriers that attempted to isolate them from one another; a place where theory and practice meet; a place that expands the disciplinary use of media into a unique location for the anthropological study of human behavior. However, most relevant to its co-investigators and the protagonists of the research project, *Son Dos Alas* created a place where anyone who uses hip-hop as a weapon to fight for her/his civil rights is a “citizen of the world.”

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### **Discography**

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The music video for "La Ley 5566" by rap duo Anónimo Consejo bases itself on the narrative of hip-hop values, more so than elements. The screen play takes us through the process of proposing what Anónimo Consejo have drawn up as law #5566, the passing of the new jurisdiction, and the celebration once the law placed into effect. The principals or value systems of law #5566 include placing one's family first, defending one's nation, not using drugs, being proud of one's origin or religion, and using one's voice without fear. The music video for "La Ley 5566" was nominated for a 2006 Cuban Lucas music video award.

<sup>2</sup> The screenplay of the music video for "Los Pelos" by rap duo Obsesión confronts paradigms of racial prejudices with respect to mainstream stereotypes of beauty and identity. The images take us through the journey of rapper Magia, the female protagonist, as she seeks to purchase a black doll. Confronted with the absence of these, she offers the solution of painting a doll as a reflection of herself that serves to empower her image. Synchronized to the chorus of the song that chants "up with the hair" and "may the dreadlocks grow" the video introduces the viewer to several integral members of the Cuban hip-hop movement with varied afro-hair styles celebrated visually as crowns of their negritude. The music video for "Los Pelos" was the recipient of the 2010 Cuban Lucas music video award.

<sup>3</sup> This song was written, recorded, and mixed on a Sunday evening at an underground studio called 26 Musas, a closet turned home recording studio in the Nuevo Vedado neighborhood of Havana. Within two days of recording we filmed short sequences of the music video at the Havana School of Ballet cafeteria and kitchen. By day five the song was written, recorded and had an accompanying music video. The concept of the song is that you can nourish your "flow" at Los Aldeanos' restauRAP called *La Conekta*. Using album covers as menus, and microphones or cables as ingredients, the song serves up a critique towards the mass consumption of the music industries.

<sup>4</sup> "Sin Permiso" is a criticism of corrupt bureaucratic processes by bourgeoisie government delegates. The lyrics place vagabonds and rebels in opposition to government authorities. Marx's lumpenproletariat (beggars, guerrilla armies, or gangs) are offered as contrasting examples to bureaucrats, government officials, soldiers, and police. The concept of lacking of permission, as the title of the song insinuates, comes into play with the taking back of power and re-leveling these types of binary relationships found in society. The overarching theme of "Sin Permiso" is about resisting authority, protest, and reclaiming balance between two ends of corrupt social cells. In Cuba, issues of class are removed from mainstream discussions of nationalism, and signaling out class or racial divisions is often viewed as unpatriotic. Where as in Puerto Rico, class issues are overlooked by the struggle for nationalism, defined as either statehood or independence. The screenplay for the music video aims to play with time, location, moving forward, and the concept of progress. One rapper is in Cuba, the other is in Puerto Rico, each moving towards a future destination which ironically takes them back to the beginning of the music video.

<sup>5</sup> The script for the music video of "Sangre Guerrera" takes us between Puerto Rico and Cuba through the delivery of "warrior blood." The "new rapper," derived from the concept of the "new socialist man," is built from sanguine fluid specimens of Cuban and Puerto Rican historical revolutionaries. The primary message of the video is to demonstrate connectivity through hip-hop, through music, through the audio-visual production, through warrior blood. The hip-hop connoisseur will also distinguish other subtle messages in the video such as the use of the t-shirt that reads "¿Y Mi Cuba Dónde Está?" (Where



is my Cuba?), and the photographic technique utilized when boxes are exchanged, intended to signal out omnipresent surveillance mechanisms.